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SUBJECT: SERBIA REPATRIATES FINAL SETS OF HUMAN REMAINS TO
KOSOVO

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. In an emotional handover on June 30, Serbia repatriated to Kosovo the final sets of human remains found in known mass grave sites in Serbia. UNMIK's Office of Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF) is now working to perform autopsies on the remains and return the few that were identified in Belgrade to their families. The rest of the remains will stay at the OMPF morgue awaiting DNA identification matches from the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP). The pace of work at OMPF is frenetic and operating funds are quickly evaporating. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On June 30 PolOff attended the final repatriation of human remains found in mass graves in Serbia at the Merdare Gate 3 administrative boundary line crossing, coordinated by UNMIK's Office of Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF). Several hundred family members of missing persons attended, along with representatives of the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP), the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), the Pristina government's commission and working group for missing persons, and Natasa Kandic of the Humanitarian Law Center of Serbia.

13. (SBU) Despite soaring temperatures, the Serbian government sent the remains back to Kosovo in a small, un-refrigerated, soft-topped cargo truck. The Chief of the Belgrade Forensics Institute accompanied the remains, along with other Serbian government officials, Serbian police, and Ministry of Interior (MUP) officers and Krassimer Nikolov, OMPF's Belgrade representative. On arrival, the truck was driven into one of the two large tents OMPF maintains at Merdare for these purposes. Family members waited in the other tent, carrying flowers and pictures of their loved ones. Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and members of UNMIK civil police (CIVPOL) stood by.

¶4. (SBU) Some family members whistled derisively when government officials from Pristina,s Provisional Institution's of Self Government (PISG) arrived. Some said they will cease cooperation with the PISG commission on missing persons now that the final known remains have been returned.

¶5. (SBU) While hidden from view inside the tent, OMPF officials unloaded and inventoried the body bags and their contents. The bags contained mixed bones, clothing and soil. Some bags were simply labeled "body parts." OMPF replaced some of the ripped and damaged bags with new ones, and cleaned them up the best they could. Then OMPF invited the family members and media to come in while the KPC stood ceremonial guard. Afterwards the KPC took custody of the remains and delivered them to the OMPF mortuary in Rahovec/Orahovac. (NOTE. Although OMPF has a new facility in Pristina, there are technical problems with the mortuary equipment. Most of the staff has already transferred to Pristina, but they are still using the old morgue in Rahovec. END NOTE.).

¶6. (SBU) Brasey told PolOff that Serbia sent more sets of remains than expected, 131 body bags versus 110. 110 of the bags were from the mass graves at Batajnica, and the extra 21 bags were marked Perucac (Bajina Basta). She said the Serbian government has already extracted DNA and sent it to the ICMP for identification, and a few of them have so far returned positive matches with ICMP's blood database. Nikolov told PolOff that in the past Serbia has only sent identified remains, and is technically violating its own laws by returning unidentified remains. Brasey added that the GOS is still waiting for a court order to enable it to return personal documents found with the bodies in the mass graves.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT. OMPF has its hands full trying to sort,
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identify, perform autopsies and issue death certificates for the remains returned from Serbia, in addition to carrying out ongoing exhumations. On one occasion in late June, OMPF was unable to comply with a CIVPOL request to secure a scene in Podujevo where someone found a skull in the woods, because OMPF was carrying out an exhumation that day and did not have the manpower to do both simultaneously. OMPF officials say they desperately need the services of an additional forensic pathologist, but have only 90,000 euros left in the bank.
END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG